



PROGRAM NEWS

United States Agency for International Development

Volume II No. 2

January 2002

**USAID/Nicaragua
Development Program
1998-2003
(U.S. Millions of Dollars)**

<i>Rule of Law and Good Governance</i>	<i>43.6</i>
<i>Small Producers</i>	<i>47.0</i>
<i>Natural Resources</i>	<i>14.0</i>
<i>Healthy Families</i>	<i>35.0</i>
<i>Primary Education</i>	<i>17.5</i>
TOTAL	US\$ 157.1
<i>Food Aid</i>	<i>13.1</i>



Organic Cardamom Cultivation Provides Farmers New Economic Opportunities

San Rafael del Norte, Nicaragua—

The Ubeda brothers are without doubt the cardamom pioneers in this mountainous region, located 180 kilometers north of Managua in the department of Jinotega. But even within the family, it took Byron Ubeda a couple of successful harvests to convince his brothers, coffee growers like the majority of farmers in the area, that the aromatic spice was a lucrative alternative to the declining value of coffee.

“Cardamom is easier to grow than coffee and the plant can last up to 15 years,” said Ubeda, “and the selling price of cardamom is more than triple the price of coffee.”

Based on the Ubeda brothers experience, 85 producers in San Rafael del Norte have shown interest in growing the spice, used as a



Low maintenance cardamom plants could be an alternative crop for Nicaraguan coffee growers affected by declining coffee prices. Producers are learning organic management of the crop.

condiment, flavoring for chewing gum and in medicines and cosmetics. Since October 2001, a group of 40 producers, members of the agricultural cooperative SERVIMUL, began participating in a pilot program, funded in part by USAID, to grow and export organic cardamom.

The project is being implemented through the Rural Development Action and Support Center (CENADE) with a \$70,000 grant from USAID's Small Producers program. The project started with 28 acres of harvestable organic cardamom and over 17 acres of cardamom plantations in development. USAID



While coffee prices have dropped to \$40 the hundredweight, Nicaraguan cardamom producers have been offered \$363 the hundredweight.

(Continued on page 2)

Organic Cardamom Cultivation.....

(Continued from page 1)

helped finance a drying facility for processing the cardamom seeds that can also be used to dry various other types of products. Training in growing the spice was offered at three workshops, attended by 115 farmers. The producers also re-

ceive technical assistance in the field from CENADE and USAID's contractor Winrock International. Cardamom nurseries have been established that will allow the project to expand cultivation to 173 acres.

A few farmers dried and exported 26.3 hundredweights of non-certified cardamom to Honduras at the beginning of the harvest season. A Swiss company is interested in buying Nicaraguan cardamom once the organic certification is granted. Producers have been offered \$3.63 per lb. of cardamom, about \$363 the hundredweight—double the price of organic coffee and nearly five times more than conventional coffee.

The USAID-funded cardamom project promotes sustainable agricultural practices using organic management. Farmers learn to make organic fertilizers using manure and other natural wastes and use natural pest controls.

"We are protecting our health and the environment as well as securing an income," said Ubeda.

Along with training in production methods, farmers are



The USAID/CENADE project helped finance a drying facility for processing cardamom. The mill will be upgraded in the future with machinery that will sort cardamom seeds according to quality. Higher quality will mean higher market prices for producers.

taught processing and marketing skills through the program. Plans include the construction of a classifying facility that will sort the cardamom into three categories according to quality. As with coffee, higher quality cardamom will mean higher market prices

for producers.

Byron Ubeda recently returned from a trip to Guatemala, financed by the program, where he met with cardamom producers and observed their techniques. Ubeda also investigated new market opportunities for Nicaraguan cardamom producers in Guatemala.

"There is a good chance that we will be able to export our cardamom to Guatemala," Ubeda said.

In addition to cardamom, the Cenade/USAID project is introducing other higher-value crops such as chili plants, lemon grass, basil and vegetable production as alternatives that could help raise living standards for Nicaraguan farmers.



Byron Ubeda, shown here at his brother's cardamom plant nursery, has pioneered the cultivation of cardamom in San Rafael del Norte.

CENADE/USAID Project Profile

Period of Grant:
*October 2001 to
October 2002*

Amount of Grant:
\$70,000

Project Focus:
*Diversification of
crops based on the
production and
exporting of organic
cardamom and
extended to specific
herbs and vegetables*

**Number of
Beneficiaries:**
100 producers

Location:
*San Rafael del Norte,
Jinotega department*



USAID Nicaragua

De la Rotonda
Centroamerica,
400 metros abajo
Managua, Nicaragua
Tel: (505) 267-0502
Fax: (505) 278-3828
<http://www.usaid.org.ni>